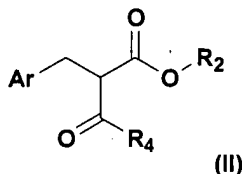


AMENDMENTS TO CLAIMS

Claims 1 to 11. (Cancelled).

Claim 12. (Original) A method of preparing a compound of formula II:



wherein  $R_2$  and  $R_4$  are independently  $C_1$  to  $C_6$  alkyl, the method comprising:  
reacting at least five equivalents of  $R_4-C(O)-CH_2-C(O)O-R_2$  with  $ArCH_2Cl$  wherein Ar is  $C_6$  or  $C_{10}$  aromatic group that can be substituted with  $C_1$  to  $C_6$  alkyl or halo, wherein the reaction is conducted in a solution consisting essentially of the reactants and no more than 1.2 molar equivalents of a base source of sodium, potassium, or lithium  $C_2$  to  $C_6$  alkoxide, which can be provided in the corresponding alcohol.

Claim 13. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the alkoxide concentration in the base source is at least 3 M.

Claim 14. (New) The method of claim 12, wherein in the compound of formula II Ar is phenyl and  $R^2$  and  $R^4$  are each methyl.

Claim 15. (New) The method of claim 12, wherein  $R_4-C(O)-CH_2-C(O)O-R_2-$  is ethyl acetoacetate,  $ArCH_2Cl$  is benzylchloride and the compound of formula II is

